

A Night in the Woods by Rosy_el

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Summary:

El knew it wouldn't be easy convincing her dad to let her go camping with a bunch of teenage boys.

(In which El goes camping for the first time.)

A Night in the Woods

Author's Note:

This was inspired by a request a request I got in my inbox, I CAN'T FIND THE MESSAGE SPECIFICALLY SO IF IT WAS YOU THANK YOU:) I feel bad not using their name specifically! This one is just nice and funny with a good side of fluff so I hope you like it!

September, 1986

Hopper had agreed on one condition: "Somebody legal's got to be there."

El had spent days building up to her request. She knew it wouldn't be easy convincing her dad to let her go camping with a bunch of teenage boys. Even though they were all like brothers to her—well, not quite. Mike Wheeler still sent Jim's radar beeping out of control. And that scrawny kid was bound to be going to be on this little overnight trip.

"Someone legal has got to be there, all night, and you don't sleep in the same tent as Wheeler." El's face lit aflame. She had never vocalized her feelings about Mike to anyone but Mike, especially not *her dad*. Was she really that obvious?

Of course she was. They both were. Mike looked at her like she was the lunar eclipse and El looked at him like he had put the stars in the sky.

"Fine," Eleven settled. She was fourteen and things weren't so easy for Jim anymore. Not that they had ever been easy. She was a psychokinetic teenage girl for crying out loud. But the teenage girl part was started to show a bit more than it had in the past. She whirled around and marched to her bedroom, mind grasping for someone *legal* to tag along.

El sprawled out on her blush pink quilted bed comforter and fiddled

with the frayed edges of her pinstripe pillow case as she reached for her bedside telephone. Six-four-three-nine-nine-two-seven. Her fingers jabbed at the tiny square buttons. El pressed the white telephone up to her ear and listened to the familiar ring like it was music.

“Hello?”

“Holly. Put Mike on,” El smiled to herself, eyes on the stucco ceiling overhead where glow-in-the-dark stars and planets were still stuck up. She liked to wake up to them in the night. “Please.”

“Yeah, so El can’t come unless someone over 18 is there. Over.” Mike held his old super-com to his mouth as he scribbled numbers to an equation on his Calc homework sheet. Will and Lucas were both at the Sinclair’s house; they had some physics project they were working on together.

“Well that sucks. Looks like it’s going to be just the boys,” Lucas concluded into his com. “Over.”

“No, wait!” Will grabbed the com from Lucas’ hand and it held it up to his own mouth. Lucas narrowed his eyes at Will dubiously, his now-empty hand still in the air. “Jonathan’s coming down from NYU this week! He can come! Over!”

Mike felt a broad smile light his face, tapping his pencil against the edge of his textbook. “It’s a plan, then. Over and out.”

After the third thump, Jim was a little worried. He followed the sound to El’s bedroom. The door was cracked open so he pushed it further, and there she was, scratching her head resentfully and going through jeans and sweatshirts on her bed.

“Woah, what’s going on here?” Jim leaned up on the frame of the door way, arms crossed against his broad chest. Her room was a mess; socks and discarded pajamas strewn all on the floor, drawers on her dresser all hanging open, clothes all dangling over the edges.

Her bed was made—thank goodness—but even she looked wild; hair all mused from her running her hands through it and a fretful frown upon her mouth.

“I’m packing and...,” she moaned and held up a purple hoodie and glared at a ketchup stain on the front. She tossed it into the dirty laundry hamper, which was nearly overflowing as it was. “I just don’t know what people take to camp.”

“Wait, what?” Jim stood up straight and entered the dirtied room. “Camping? What are you talking about?”

El furrowed her eyebrows and stared at him, annoyed. “I already talked to you about this last week, remember? We’re going camping tonight!”

“Alright, alright,” Jim remembered the previous conversation but didn’t necessarily remember saying yes to her going. But El was already on top of it.

“Jonathan is coming with us,” she submitted confidently. Jim narrowed his eyes at the teenage girl. “*You* said I could come if someone legal was with us all night! Jonathan’s 19!”

Jim made a wincing face and rubbed his prickly chin, sitting down on El’s bed. He studied the room.

The bedspread was an apricot pink. The bed skirt and pillows matched, the same pink color with tiny vertical white stripes. There was a cream-colored teddy bear propped up on the throw pillows; a gift from Jim on her first Christmas in Hawkins—her first Christmas at *home*. Her dresser was wide and white and littered with framed pictures and little mementos; a rubix cube and an Indiana Jones action figure and photographs of her and Jim at different holidays and summer road trips. There was one of the two of them standing outside the Indianapolis Children’s Museum, El grinning so big you could hardly see her eyes, arms wrapped around Jim who gave a cheeky thumbs-up. There was another of them at a Hoosiers game, all decked out in sweatshirts and burgundy and white knitted hats, faces flushed pink from the nipping cold. Then there were pictures of her and the boys. One of them at El’s first birthday party, her shiny pink

bike proudly on display in front of the band of kids. Another of her and Mike at the lake, sunglasses on and arms wrapped awkwardly around one another's shoulders. She had a bookcase, crammed with classics and sci-fi graphic novels and even Will's original comic about El herself. Another volume of Will's joined the first side-by-side; it seemed to be becoming a birthday tradition for Will to come out with a new Eleven edition as his gift to her. There were *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* posters hung up, along with a newspaper clipping of the boys winning a state science fair.

"Now does this room belong to a teenage girl or a twelve-year-old boy?"

"Dad!" El shook him irritably. Jim smiled crookedly.

"No sharing a tent with Wheeler." He looked at her hard, the teasing in his eyes still there but only slightly. "Do you understand me?"

Eleven licked her lips nervously and her cheeks grew heated. "Yes."

Jim nodded. "Alright. In that case; let's get you packed." He stood up off the edge of the bed and started going through the various long-sleeved shirts and sweatshirts and vests she had laid out as options. "Oh, and El?"

"Yeah?"

"This room better be clean before you leave."

El rolled her eyes so he couldn't see but nodded.

"And you need to help do a load of laundry before they pick you up, too."

The fourteen-year-old groaned and plopped face-first onto her bed.

El (with Jim's input) had settled on wearing a pair of old jeans, a blue and green striped turtleneck, a pink hooded sweatshirt, and her beat-up pair of black converse. She had packed her duffle with a pair of flannel pajamas and two extra pairs of socks in addition to the

marshmallows she was assigned to bring and a few packs of skittles for good measure.

The boys honked from outside.

El ran to the window and waved, smile bright on her face. “They’re here, Dad! Bye, love you!” She called, ripping the front door open.

“Hey! Wait a second, kid!” Jim jogged into the living room and tossed a blue plaid flannel jacket of his into the air. El caught it was ease. “Just in case.”

The girl smiled and gave her dad a hug, holding his big jacket in her arms tightly. “I love you El,” Jim ruffled her loosely braided hair. “And remember—” he started, shooing her out the door.

“No sharing a tent with Wheeler.” El finished, a small smirk bending her mouth.

“El, you seriously can’t help *at all*?” Dustin pouted, holding random poles in his hands while staring at the heap of material on the ground that was allegedly supposed to form a tent.

“No! We are *men*.” Lucas stomped his foot. “We’re going put together this stupid tent if it’s the last damn thing we do!” He pulled the instruction paper out flat and glared at it stubbornly again, eyebrows crinkled in concentration.

El couldn’t help much even if they wanted her to considering she had no clue regarding the mechanics of putting together a tent. It was her first time camping, after all. Mike and Will were trying to put together El’s tent with her, which proved to be a much better team compared to Jonathan, Lucas, and Dustin.

“I think those two might go together,” El would point to the pieces in Will’s hands and Mike would offer his affectionate agreement.

“I don’t know, Lucas. I think that piece goes through this slip,” Dustin would offer.

“Shut up, Dustin. I know what I’m doing.”

Lucas most certainly did not know what he was doing, however, which left Jonathan laughing and “documenting” their efforts, snapping shots of the tent with various poles and flaps haphazardly sticking out in all directions.

“You know; you could actually help us instead of taking a bunch of cutesy pictures!” Lucas protested loudly. Jonathan mumbled something sourly and then got to work, pulling out the incorrect poles (every pole) and pointing to where they really probably went.

They finished in little over an hour with the sun setting over the line of the trees.

Eleven watched Mike as he pulled his perfectly golden marshmallow away from his stick and pressed it between two graham cracker squares and a rectangle of chocolate. “A s’more,” he proclaimed, breaking it in half and offering the bigger half to her. She stared at the thing and then pushed it into her mouth all once.

They took turns telling scary stories. El burned three marshmallows while sucked up into a story, eyes glued to whatever storyteller was taking their turn. Where the other boys would flinch and jump at the climax of the really intense ones, El would simply gasp and grin out of excitement; the stories didn’t scare her.

She knew what real fear was like.

Mike checked his watch. 2:37 a.m. He rubbed his wilted eyes with his fist, head droopy and a yawn pulling at his mouth. “We should put the fire out,” he said, standing up off his seat on the log and brushing the dirt off his jeans. The others nodded, all suddenly realizing how tired they were, too. They tossed water on the dying embers and packed dirt on top.

The boys ducked into their big tent and El into her much smaller one that sat about fifteen feet away. She stripped her smoky clothes off over her head and wiggled out of her dirtied blue jeans. Eleven slipped on her red and black flannel pajama bottoms and buttoned up the matching top. She sat down cross-legged on top of her sleeping

bag and let her fingers slide across the slippery material. She unzipped the flap of the door just enough to see the moon breaking through the black clouds overhead. It was giant and yellow and full.

The other boys were already passed out by the time Mike laid down in his sleeping bag, sweats and long-sleeved thermal shirt on.

Mike.

His eyes opened softly. The sound was barely there; a brush of fingertips across the back of his mind.

Mike?

Mike sat up and looked around the tent. The boys were all sprawled out, legs crossing and snores quiet. Well, not Dustin's snores. "Hello?" Mike whispered.

Mike!

"El?" Mike crawled out of his sleeping bag and opened the tent as quietly as he could.

Eleven stood right outside. Mike jumped and covered his mouth, a sharp yelp escaping his throat. No one stirred. "El? What's wrong?" He tried to ignore the embarrassment on his face, lowering his voice and running his hand through his hair coolly.

"I don't want to sleep alone."

He gulped. El looked like something out of a dream standing there; hair ruffled and hands nervously folded behind her back and brown eyes wide.

"But Hop—" Mike was deathly afraid of El's father, as he should be.

"He said I couldn't sleep in the same *tent* as you," El picked at the ends of her flannel sleeves, head bowed down and hair covering her tinted cheeks. Mike looked past her and saw her sleeping bag and pillow outside her tent on the ground, a milk-colored teddy bear tucked into the blankets. El smirked at the ground, chewing her lip as she awaited Mike's reply shyly. He was already pulling his sleeping

bag out of the tent.

“Are you cold?” Mike laid on his back, staring at the sky.

“No,” El replied, her body in identical position, bear tucked into her elbow.

Silence fell again between them. They watched the moon.

“Mike?”

“Hm?”

“Are *you* cold?”

“A little.”

“Okay.”

She sat up and wriggled her sleeping back closer, shifting onto her side to look at him. “Your hands,” she gestured. Mike gave them to her timidly but obediently. El rubbed them back and forth with her own and then brought them up to her mouth, expelling warm air onto his knuckles. Mike watched her through lowered lashes, face *and* hands suddenly hot.

“Better?” Her hair was spread across the pillow and her eyes looked full of moonlit sleep.

“Better.”

Jonathan found them at 4 a.m., holding hands, heavy breaths and fluttering eyelids signifying a deep sleep, when he woke up to use the bathroom. He grabbed his camera and snapped a picture, the flash enlightening the forest for a mere moment before plunging it back into inky darkness.

Mike didn’t hear the end of it from the other guys for three weeks after.

Jonathan took another picture that morning; one of El and Will and Mike and Lucas and Dustin all sitting around the 9 a.m. fire, hair

messy and groggy smiles lighting each of their faces, plates with eggs and bacon (courtesy of Dustin) on their laps.

El promptly hung it in her locker at school as soon as Jonathan got her a copy. She smiled every time she pulled open her locker to put her books away and saw the picture, thinking back to the cool September night that she first went camping—no tent required.

Author's Note:

Again, thank you so much for reading and please PLEASE leave a comment or idea for a fic, I'm always in search for a good little idea to keep the ball rolling! :) I am infinitely grateful for all the feedback I've gotten so far. Thank you.